

EVALUATION OF AN IMPEDANCE THRESHOLD DEVICE AS A VIIP COUNTERMEASURE

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INTRODUCTION

Visual Impairment/Intracranial Pressure (VIIP) is a top human spaceflight risk for which NASA does not currently have a proven mitigation strategy. Thigh cuffs (Braslets) and lower body negative pressure (LBNP; Chibis) devices have been or are currently being evaluated as a means to reduce VIIP signs and symptoms, but these methods alone may not provide sufficient relief of cephalic venous congestion and VIIP symptoms. Additionally, current LBNP devices are too large and cumbersome for their systematic use as a countermeasure. Therefore, a novel approach is needed that is easy to implement and provides specific relief of symptoms. This investigation will evaluate an impedance threshold device (ITD) as a VIIP countermeasure.

The ITD works by providing up to 7 cm H₂O (~5 mmHg) resistance to inspiratory air flow, effectively turning the thorax into a vacuum pump upon each inhalation that lowers the intrathoracic pressure (ITP) and facilitates venous return to the heart. The ITD is FDA-approved and was developed to augment venous return to the central circulation and increase cardiac output during cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and in patients with hypotension. While the effect of ITD on CPR survival outcomes is controversial, the ITD's ability to lower ITP with a concomitant decrease in intracranial pressure (ICP) is well documented. A similar concept that creates negative ITP during exhalation (intrathoracic pressure regulator; ITPR) decreased ICP in 16 of 20 patients with elevated ICP in a hospital pilot study. ITP and central venous pressure (CVP) have been shown to decrease in microgravity. However ITP drops more than CVP, indicating an increased transmural CVP. This could explain the paradoxical distention of jugular veins (JV) in microgravity despite lower absolute CVP and also suggests that JV transmural pressure is not dramatically elevated. Use of an ITD may lower JV pressure enough to remove or relieve cephalic venous congestion.

During spaceflight experiments with Braslet thigh cuffs and modified (open-glottis) Mueller maneuvers, Braslets alone reduced cardiac preload but only reduced the internal JV (IJV) cross sectional area by 23%. The addition of Mueller maneuvers resulted in an IJV area reduction of 48%. This project will test if ITD essentially applies a Mueller maneuver with added negative ITP in every respiratory cycle, acting to: 1) reduce venous congestion in the neck and 2) potentially lower ICP. The expected mechanism of action is that in microgravity (or an analog), blood is relocated toward the heart from vasculature in the head and neck.

Once validated, the ITD would be an exceptionally easy countermeasure to deploy and test on the International Space Station. Dosage could be altered through 1) duration of application and 2) inspiratory resistance set point. Effects could be additionally enhanced through co-application with other countermeasures such as thigh cuffs or LBNP.

METHODS

The experimental approach is to use a battery of tests that are currently being used to evaluate the effects of other interventions. Healthy test subjects (n=15) will participate in two sessions, one with an ITD and one with a sham ITD (placebo). Subjects will be evaluated in the seated and supine positions as well as head down tilt (HDT) postures, including 6 and 15 degree HDT. Measures taken at each posture will include IJV cross sectional area, IJV and carotid artery Doppler, VeinPress estimations of IJV pressure, transcranial Doppler, optic nerve sheath diameter, superior ophthalmic vein Doppler, optical coherence tomography, cochlear and cerebral fluid pressure analysis, otoacoustic emissions, intraocular pressure, facial soft tissue thickness and hyperemia, arterial blood pressure, ECG, and heart rate. Venous pH and pCO₂ will be measured to determine if the ITD causes elevated blood CO₂ levels.

DISCUSSION

Pilot data demonstrated substantial reductions in IJV cross sectional area and in estimated ICP as measured by CCFP. The investigation team recognizes that ITD use as a routine countermeasure during spaceflight may not be particularly comfortable in its current form and function. The purpose of the planned work is to 1) use the ITD as a tool to further understand VIIP, and 2) establish the effectiveness of this methodology before embarking on more in-depth investigations that could optimize acceptability to crewmembers as a countermeasure. Subjects have been recruited and testing is planned for fall/winter 2106; preliminary data will be presented.

Supported by the NASA Omnibus program through the Human Health and Performance Contract (HHPC).